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TAGS: PREL PGOV UK EI

SUBJECT: THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S VIEW ON THE NORTHERN
IRELAND NEGOTIATIONS

REF: BELFAST 4

Classified By: Amb. Daniel M. Rooney. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 13, the Ambassador spoke with an official in the Irish Prime Minister's office about the January 12 meeting between Irish Foreign Minister Micheal Martin and UK Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward. The Ambassador also spoke to Woodward himself. In addition, Econoff spoke to an Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) official about the same issue. All were "encouraged" by the reports coming out of the Democratic Ulster Party (DUP)/Sinn Fein (SF) discussions, the likely result of which will be an agreement on devolution of policing and justice in exchange for a "roadmap" to resolve the parades impasse. He added that the two governments are reviewing a "Plan B" for reinstituting direct rule in Northern Ireland if the talks fail but before resorting to that would convene an all-party conference as a last-ditch effort to reach a compromise. The Irish believe that the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) is starting to "play politics" over the impasse. While UK PM Brown was due to speak with UUP leader Reg Empey about staying "onside," the DFA official said that any help the USG could offer with the UUP would be helpful. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On January 13, the Ambassador spoke with Martin Fraser, the Irish PM's advisor on Northern Ireland regarding the Martin-Woodward meeting. In addition, Woodward briefed the Ambassador on his meeting with Martin. Also, Econoff spoke with Kevin Conmy, Counselor for Political Affairs in the Anglo-Irish Division of the DFA about the same meeting. Conmy said that Martin and Woodward had been meeting at least weekly since October and talk almost every day. According to Conmy, both governments are "encouraged" by the reports coming out of the DUP/SF discussions, but the two parties are being fairly secretive about the particulars of the negotiations. Conmy said that "everything is on the table" and thought that the ultimate deal will likely be an agreement on devolution of policing and justice in return for a "roadmap" on the parades issue.

¶3. (C) Conmy said that the UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown meeting with Irish Prime Minister Brian Cowen on January 14 was intended to signal to the DUP and Sinn Fein that both governments are watching with "intense interest." While hoping that they do not need to deploy it, Conmy asserted that Irish and UK officials are reviewing a "Plan B" for reinstituting direct rule of Northern Ireland with close collaboration between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Fraser told the Ambassador that he thought that moving to "Plan B" was the wrong thing to do. Woodward told the Ambassador that such a move was a last resort. Conmy said that both governments wanted to ensure that, "even if the negotiations on devolution collapse, the peace process won't."

¶4. (C) Conmy said that Deputy DUP Leader Nigel Dodds, one of the lead negotiators for the DUP, has moved from recalcitrant to helpful after feeling some pressure from the DUP rank-and-file, none of whom relish going to the polls in the

midst of the Robinson scandal (reftel). According to Conmy, a deal has to happen this week or early next, otherwise talks will fall apart. At that point, the Irish and UK governments would convene an all-party conference, which Conmy described would be a "head-banging session." He believed Sinn Fein would support such a conference, while the DUP "would have no choice."

¶ 15. (C) Conmy noted that the Social Democrat Labour Party (SDLP) was saying all the right things at this point but said that the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) is starting to "play politics" a bit. He said that PM Brown was scheduled to speak with UUP leader Reg Empey on January 13 to get him "onside" and that anything the USG could do to assist would be much appreciated.

ROONEY